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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 KABUL 002510

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SUBJECT: PRT BAMYAN: SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT ON SECURITY,
POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SITUATION

REF: KABUL 370

Classified By: Political Counselor SRosenberry for reasons 1.4 (B) and
(D)

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Unlike some neighboring provinces, Bamyan Province has enjoyed a calm security and political situation during the last six months. There is increased concern over threats from outside, due drug and weapons trade believed to be transiting the province. Bamyan remains one of Afghanistan's poorest provinces and faces steep obstacles to development. Bamyan's population, predominately Hazara, continues to feel alienated from the central government. Both provincial and national officials need to work on building stronger ties between Bamyan and the capital. END SUMMARY.

SECURITY

¶2. (C) Bamyan's security situation is relatively stable. In late June, the NDS office in Bamyan advised the PRT that the Taliban was attempting to recruit volunteers for attacks in Bamyan; potential targets were reported to be the governor, foreign NGOs, and the PRT itself. The PRT increased its security level for a short time, and steps were taken to improve the governor's personal security, but no substantive evidence was discovered to back up the threat report. PRT Bamyan has returned to a more relaxed security stance, but continues to monitor the situation.

¶3. (U) Poppy cultivation in Bamyan remains negligible. Reports that the province is used as a transport route for both opium and weapons are credible, given Bamyan's location on Afghanistan's major east-west axis. Substantiation of these reports is limited to sporadic seizures by the ANP. PRT Bamyan patrols and PRT police advisers work closely with the ANP to set up surprise vehicle checkpoints.

¶4. (SBU) PRT Bamyan and the ANP are increasingly

concerned that the deteriorating security situation in the neighboring provinces of Baghlan, Wardak, and Dai Kundi will spill over into Bamyan. Bamyan has been an island of stability, but it may not be able to remain isolated from its neighbors' troubles. There is no PRT in Dai Kundi, and very little if any coordination between ANP forces across provinces. Maintaining stability within central Afghanistan will require closer coordination and information sharing among PRTs : Baghlan (Hungary); Wardak (Turkey); and Bamyan (New Zealand).

15. (U) The Regional Training Center in Bamyan continues to provide a high level of training to police recruits from Bamyan and other provinces in the central highlands. Of particular note is that most of RTC's recent basic training courses have included female police recruits. There is a need for follow-up training of ANP forces in Bamyan's outlying districts and for mentoring of district police commanders. The New Zealand police advisers at PRT Bamyan have begun to address this need by making a round of visits to the districts to observe the police at work, assess their effectiveness, and provide additional training. Currently Bamyan RTC has only one Dyncorps police mentor. The RTC needs an additional Dyncorps mentor to focus on training the ANP in the field. The effects of police reform efforts are just now taking hold in Bamyan, with the arrival in the last few months of a new provincial deputy chief of police, a new colonel responsible for administration, and the replacement of some district chiefs.

KABUL 00002510 002 OF 004

POLITICAL

16. (U) Governor Habiba Sarabi has maintained her popularity among the people of Bamyan. In March Sarabi was the subject of an investigation by the Attorney General's office, which was initiated by a small group of the governor's political opponents in Kabul and Bamyan. It was alleged that Sarabi had allowed individuals to occupy unlawfully privately-owned land, permitted the promotion of Christianity, and given a sermon on the eve of the last Eid. Representatives of the Attorney General's office came to Bamyan to conduct the investigation but took no further action. The allegations caused no real difficulty for the governor.

17. (U) It is uncertain how long Governor Sarabi will remain in her position, as her family is in Kabul. Should she depart, there is no obvious candidate to replace her. As Afghanistan's first female governor, Sarabi receives extensive international media coverage. During this six-month period Sarabi was the subject of profiles on CNN and Canadian television, and a television crew from Poland was recently in Bamyan to film a story on her.

18. (U) Bamyan has an active and engaged Provincial Council, which exercises an oversight role in most areas of provincial government. Mohammad Muhsini recently became chairman of the Provincial Council, replacing Haji Etemadi. Muhsini is the chief mullah in Bamyan city and is a highly respected and influential figure among all sectors of Bamyan society. The Provincial Council and Governor Sarabi enjoy a cordial relationship, but they have clashed over development priorities for the province. Governor Sarabi has placed top priority on road construction, while the Provincial Council has emphasized education. These

differences were aired at a public forum in March.

¶9. (U) Governor Sarabi and the directors of the provincial line departments responded promptly to the destruction caused by spring flooding, avalanches, and landslides. Governor Sarabi initiated weekly meetings of an "emergency response group," which included the directors of the relevant departments, the chief of police, and representatives of the PRT, UNAMA, and NGOs. This group has continued to meet on an almost-weekly basis, with the focus switching to development issues.

¶10. (U) A four-day conference discussing development priorities was held in Bamyan city the first week of July as part of the ANDS sub-national consultations process. Bamyan was already well ahead of the game: it entered into the process with a development plan which had already achieved a fairly broad consensus within the province. The ANDS consultations forced provincial officials and representatives to consider not just their immediate priorities, but what the province will need over the next few years.

ECONOMICS AND RECONSTRUCTION

¶11. (U) This year should see an increase in agricultural production, due to heavier spring rains. USAID and NGOs such as Global Partners are making a concerted effort to construct potato storage facilities in Bamyan. Potatoes are one of the province's major crops, and the storage facilities will allow farmers to hold their harvest for a period of time and sell it when market conditions are favorable.

KABUL 00002510 003 OF 004

¶12. (U) The current construction season has seen many projects get under way in Bamyan city. A total of seven new buildings are under construction at the site of the Bamyan "new town" center; these buildings will house provincial government departments and a madrassa. A lack of skilled workers and heavy equipment have hampered construction projects in Bamyan. Many contractors for Bamyan projects come from outside the province and use non-local labor, which has caused resentment among Bamyan residents.

¶13. (U) The USAID-funded airfield road in Bamyan city will be paved this summer after some earlier delays. USAID is also funding the paving of a road through the Bamyan city bazaar, which should be completed prior to the onset of winter. The government of Japan is funding the paving of the road which leads from the bazaar to the area of the Buddha niches. When complete, these will be the first paved roads in Bamyan province. The paving of these roads has taken on great symbolic significance for Governor Sarabi; the governor has often commented that she views paved roads as a major part of her legacy.

¶14. (U) The Asia Development Bank announced that it will provide a total of \$17 million to fund micro-hydro and small hydro plants in the four poorest provinces of Afghanistan, including Bamyan. The demand for electric power in Bamyan communities is high, as the province is not part of a power grid. Some communities have taken the initiative to construct their own micro-hydro plants. Afghan Telecommunications recently erected a cellular tower in Bamyan city and initiated cell phone service in the center district. Outside of the center district, however, there is still no cellular service.

¶15. (U) The Afghanistan National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) is preparing a proposal for Parliament to designate the Band-I-Amir Lakes region in Bamyan as the country's first national park. NEPA has carefully assessed the area around the lakes in an effort to ensure that the designation will not have a negative impact on the local economy. A modern new hotel, the Bamyan Silk Road, recently opened in Bamyan city; such accommodations are badly needed if Bamyan is to realize its potential as a tourist destination.

SOCIAL

¶16. (U) Male Bamyan University students held a series of demonstrations in June after the laying of the cornerstone for a new dormitory for female students at the university. The university does not have a dorm for male students, who for the large part live in the back rooms of shops in the bazaar. (Note: Funding for the dormitory for female students was provided by a private foundation. End note.) The demonstrations remained peaceful, and the police made no attempt to break them up.

¶17. (U) In May, students from the Bamyan teachers training college marched on the governor's office to protest the lack of qualified instructors. Instead of providing additional funding for the teachers training college, however, the Ministry of Education chose to construct a madrassa at the Bamyan new town site, a project which was not part of the Provincial Development Plan.

¶18. (SBU) Bamyan residents have expressed concern about the possible encroachment of Kuchi tribesmen and their herds on established pasture lands. As in Wardak province, anti-Kuchi sentiment in Bamyan risks provoking bloodshed in future years if the central government does not explore a sustainable solution to

KABUL 00002510 004 OF 004

the recurring tensions. During an anti-Kuchi demonstration in Bamyan city in June, demonstrators carried banners demanding that the government disarm the Kuchis -- just as other groups in Afghanistan are obligated to disarm. There are no ANA units in Bamyan, and provincial police will have a difficult time containing any eruption of violence.

¶19. (U) Governor Sarabi and members of the Provincial Council have been openly critical this spring of what they see as an inadequate level of U.S. and international funding for development projects in Bamyan. They draw comparisons between the funding provided to Bamyan and the funding for provinces such as Helmand and Kandahar. They assert that Bamyan is not adequately rewarded for its stable security environment and lack of poppy cultivation. The completion of some high profile development projects, such as the paving of roads in Bamyan city, will help address this criticism.

HAZARA COMMUNITY DECRIES NEGLECT

¶20. (c) District administrators and other officials support Governor Sarabi and the provincial government, but they complain the central government in Kabul does not care about Bamyan. As one official put it, Governor Sarabi has done a good job, considering that she receives no help from Kabul. High-ranking

officials from Kabul rarely visit the province. During the recent sub-national consultations, the highest ranking official in attendance was the deputy minister of higher education. Hazaras hold positions of authority in the national government, including cabinet positions, but Hazaras in Bamyan do not feel a strong allegiance to Kabul. They maintain that nothing has changed for them under the government, and that Hazaras must continue to do for themselves.

¶21. (C) Hazara complaints ignore the most significant benefit they have received under the Karzai government -- freedom from the government-sanctioned persecution they endured under the Taliban regime. Pashtun leaders in turn allege that the Hazara community, envious of political and financial attention to the Southeast where insecurity is at its peak, is exacerbating the severity of current Hazara-Kuchi tensions in order to draw international community attention and more development assistance to geographic areas where they are prominent. Whether or not this is true, the IROA and international community will need to keep these sensitivities in mind as decisions are made about appointments and resource allocation.

WOOD